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THREE FACTORS IN VITALIZING THE STUDY OF THE CLASSICS

BY CLARA JANET ALLISON
Hastings, Michigan

Before every teacher of the classics today there is a problem upon whose solution depends the future of Latin and Greek as subjects of general culture. This problem, as the writer sees it, is to meet present conditions with present means; in other words, in the brief time at the command of the classical teacher and without increase of the teaching force, to meet the need of culture for the average pupil of the high school with his lack of appreciation for the culture subjects in comparison with so-called practical subjects.

A few decades ago our high schools contained but the select few fitted by nature and inclination to become scholars. Today with our broader and better conception of the function of the public school we bring into it every young person who can be forced or coaxed thither, not primarily that we may produce great men in letters or in the professions, but that we may prepare these boys and girls for citizenship and fit them for service. This is the word which strikes the true keynote of the modern ideal in education. Herbert Spencer's great epoch-making work on *Education* was a revolt against the older and narrower ideal, but, like all revolts, sought to cast out not to incorporate, that which it opposed. Absorbed with man's first duty, to make a living for himself and those dependent upon him, Spencer gave little thought to the fact that no man can live by bread alone. So, too, the educator of today in his zeal for the boy's material welfare many times forgets that to prepare him to spend his leisure hours is a duty equally important and that the need for such preparation is increasing yearly through our changing labor conditions. Will not the manner in which a man's leisure is spent determine his character as a citizen? Is it of less importance that the boy's capacity for enjoyment be trained than that he be made self-supporting?

It is with this question that we are concerned; for it is our duty and privilege to aid in laying broad and deep the founda-

tions of culture and to remember that culture is no longer to be confined to a class, but that it is today the right and need of every boy and girl. That it is his right, the high-school boy cares little; that it is a necessity, he personally does not believe; that the subjects whose chief aim is culture have a value compared with those whose utilitarian end is plain, he cannot conceive. To prove to him their value as such things only can be proved to boys and girls, through the heart rather than the intellect, is of first importance, and, speaking for Latin and Greek, can be accomplished only through thoroughly vitalizing all study of these subjects. In this the personality of the teacher is the chief factor; next in value I rank the following: attention to the individual, the use of the class hour as a study period, and the high-school classical club.

Consultation with other teachers shows two facts: first, a general belief that the individual touch of the teacher upon the pupil is essential, and secondly, that the time obtainable for this is very limited. Judging both from personal experience and observation, the teacher who deems it necessary to give attention to the individual has two objects in view: to help the backward student, and to make sure of the indolent. If, as the majority will agree, backwardness is the result primarily of a failure, largely due to indolence, in mastering form and vocabulary, whatever plan we may evolve by which each pupil does master these essentials thoroughly will enable us with very limited time to meet the needs of the really dull.

Any real gain from Latin or Greek demands much apparent drudgery, and present conditions require that this be done with little friction. No boy likes to be asked to make up work after hours, and I think that too many times this is what the time which we devote to individual work is taken up with. When such a use of that time becomes usual, spirit is lacking, work drags, and time is wasted. All this we have seen in our own classrooms and in those of others. It is general responsibility which the boy shirks, at least that which he thinks is general. To a personal responsibility he will usually respond loyally. We will suppose an instance: *is*, *ea*, *id*, the demonstrative, is assigned as a part of the lesson. It proves somewhat difficult to memorize; there

are many outside interests calling—many more, remember, than there would have been for the same boy a few years ago—he hasn't time for everything, so takes chances on the pronoun. He reasons, subconsciously perhaps, that he is only one in a class of twenty or twenty-five and that the teacher cannot call on all; he is lucky this time, at least he thinks so; another assignment goes in the same way; soon he has trouble, he finds forms that he does not recognize and which he cannot find by much searching of the vocabulary; he says, "Pshaw! What's the use? This old Latin takes too much time anyway, I am going to quit!" This is not an ideal picture but it is realistic, and we must find some remedy or let the boy go, for the devices that were common a few years ago for making him get his lessons are obsolete so far as real effectiveness is concerned. Make the same assignment with the statement that this pronoun will be reported upon by each one, at the same time setting a time limit for these reports, and you will find yourself assailed in all sorts of unexpected spots with the question, "Can you hear this report now, please?" This, too, is not ideal but realistic and is a plan that can be applied to pronouns, irregular adjectives, and nouns, vocabulary reviews, and in short to all that should be learned verbatim. There is need even in the simple assignments to make the time limit more than one day; this for the sake of the pupil who finds memorizing particularly difficult and because it should afford ample opportunity for each to make his report. It may also be necessary on the last day to remind the class that reports to receive credit must all be in by night.

The objections made to this simple plan are two: the amount of drudgery involved and the time required. To the first I would reply that the real drudgery of our teaching lies in listening to the half-hearted or wholly spiritless attempts of pupils to make up work; with this condition eliminated, drudgery likewise disappears. As to the necessary time, chinked into odd moments as many of these reports may be, the excess of time is not so great as one would think. Moreover, the hearing of declensions, vocabulary reviews, and the like, being purely mechanical work, can be delegated to pupils of whom it is necessary to require only that they

be accurate in general and particularly so in the matter of pronunciation. On the other hand, the gains from such a use of the time devoted to individual work are definite: on the part of the pupil a greater mastery of form and vocabulary, since he does not come with a half-learned lesson to make an individual report, and by the elimination of the laggard, a much greater amount of the ever essential drill work for the class; for the teacher, a chance to detect real difficulties with time to clear these up, and to aid in the correct interpretation of the text. The results are greater power and facility in translation and, with the feeling of elation which comes from the consciousness of work well done, increased interest and life in the class.

With so much of the mechanical part of our work out of the way, the class hour is at our disposal to make the most of—a rapid drill and a quick review of the previous lesson, then the preparation of the advanced lesson, not mere suggestions, but actual preparation of the lesson for recitation. It is impossible that this proposition should not be met with much doubt, probably with something much more emphatic, but I hope to show that the objections and obstacles are only apparent.

You will pardon me if I digress to remind you again that I am not speaking today for the typical student of twenty or even ten years ago, but for the pupil who needs what Latin can give him and does not know it, the boy who naturally follows the line of least resistance, the one who must have his backbone stiffened. Changing educational ideals have brought a corresponding change in the type of student and in his ideals, and we must deal with what is. I was struck by the recent remark of one who has been a most successful teacher of the classics for the past twenty years, that Latin is more difficult every year. This can have but one meaning, that, coupled with the numerous demands made upon him, perhaps growing out of these, the pupil of today has less power within himself to help himself. To say whether this be wholly true or to seek the causes for it lies outside of the present discussion; the condition to which it points does concern us. The reasons given by pupils for dropping Latin and not taking Greek are chiefly that they are too hard and take too much time. The pupil

of today will not give to these what seem to him, by comparison with the requirements of other subjects, an undue amount of time. This is a fact from which we cannot escape, but our attitude toward this pupil, who is the product of present-day thinking, will be determined by our valuation of classical study for him.

No lengthy argument is necessary to prove that if the advanced lesson were prepared in class under the direction of the teacher wrong methods of study would be eliminated and every moment made to count. When such devices as looking up each word not immediately recognized, writing down the meaning regardless of context, and then patching the whole together, are resorted to, there can be only one result, hard work and small gains by no means commensurate with the time and labor involved. President Eliot, in *Educational Reform*, p. 164, quotes and emphasizes the words of Friederich Paulsen, to the effect that it is not work which causes overfatigue so much as the lack of conscious progress. It is the last which is the root of the matter, for without consciousness of progress interest is impossible. It is because of this lack that pupils weary and with no interest soon become discouraged and in this condition are but added obstacles to the progress of the class.

All teachers say that beginning classes must have new principles developed for them and suggestions made. It is not impossible in addition to this, after studying with the class a new vocabulary, to proceed to the following exercise and call for sight translation, the teacher, of course, performing the function of grammar and dictionary. Such a method of procedure certainly begets spirit in the pupils and greater confidence in their own powers. A class with which half of an exercise is worked out in this fashion will go on and finish the assignment and do it with a spirit wholly absent under the ordinary plan; this because they have found themselves, so to speak, in the portion studied under direction. It is unnecessary to say in this connection that nothing should ever be done for pupils that they can do for themselves. Not only do beginners need constant help and direction, but, whenever the question as to where the most failures occur has been under discussion, the consensus of opinion has placed this in the second year, and the reason always given is that the change from comparatively simple

Latin to Caesar puts the pupil into a maze of difficulties out of which he often finds it impossible to find his way. With this admitted reason for his failure, it seems to me imperative that we should act as ever-watchful guides rather than as commanders issuing orders for a march, on which we know that many must fall by the way. Likewise, in changing from Caesar to Cicero and again from prose to poetry our pupils have need of this same direction and assistance, although the period of their dependence will be shorter.

I anticipate two objections to the preparation of the advanced lesson in the class. One of these, inevitable because of our own training, is that we are doing the work for the pupil. This I deny, unless we too take the line of least resistance; but we can by this means supply his needs: if his questions show lack of comprehension, explaining, if carelessness, insisting upon careful thinking; in matters of vocabulary, developing the general meaning of the word, then fitting it to the context by special or derived significance or sending him to the vocabulary and showing him how to select for himself, giving him sentences as wholes from which he can get a general sense before he seeks the particular; in short, becoming his guide for every new step until at last he has the will to walk alone with confidence in his own powers. "I like Latin when I can get it," is a not uncommon remark, and we cannot afford to disregard the suggestion it conveys. Precedent for such a use of the class hour is to be found in the German schools with whose methods some of you are familiar. Dr. G. Stanley Hall, in a lecture entitled "Made in Germany," by way of illustration follows the teaching of Latin from the first steps through Cicero and Virgil. The message of this lecture is, "Teach! Teach! Ask no pupil to take a step in advance except under direction." If the Germans do not make weak and dependent students by this method, neither need we.

The second objection is the shortness of our class periods. Here I admit a real difficulty but not an insuperable one. The German teacher has more periods in a week for Latin and more years in which to cover the ground which we must cover in four; we must therefore make some modifications while following the

spirit of his example. In doing this, progress must of necessity be slow at first, but the class preparation of the advanced lesson can gradually give way in the second year to lessons studied by the pupils who bring all difficulties to class to be cleared up before translation is attempted. Questions should and will grow less every day, and the amount of text covered will increase rapidly during the second semester, the rapidity of work at the close of the year making up for the lack of it at the beginning. Many of you will recall President Angell's account of his own experience in preparatory Latin as he told it at one of our meetings a few years ago. You will remember how the small class in which he was placed for his first real work in translation began with Virgil, laboring at first over three lines a day, but by the end of the year reading two hundred.

Concerning the classical club in the high school, since its functions and value should be well known through the many reports of such organizations published in the *Classical Journal*, it seems only necessary to emphasize a few facts indicated by these reports.

There is a general belief that collateral work is helpful in increasing interest in the study of the classics, but there are objections to any amount of this in connection with the regular class work. The May number of the *Classical Journal* for 1908 devotes several pages to this subject, and the discussion is based on reports from a number of high schools and colleges. According to these reports, wherever the amount of collateral work done is meager two chief reasons are given: first, that it is not the province of classical training merely to furnish information; secondly, that the recitation is too short. Whatever our exact attitude toward the first, we shall doubtless agree that information is not our primary aim, and this fact combined with the second reason makes an insuperable obstacle to any amount of collateral work in the regular class period. Even that essential to the understanding of the text must be as brief as possible. This amount is not sufficient to satisfy the high-school student that he is dealing with live men and women; and real things, even photographs and pictures passed about the class, fail to some extent in illustration and therefore in arousing interest, because there is not time for careful

inspection and individual questions. The report from which I have already quoted shows in conclusion that difficulties are largely obviated by voluntary organizations and emphasizes the fact that whenever these clubs exist the interest, without exception, is very great. One point to be noted as most important to this result is the necessity for illustrating the various programs.

While such societies have existed for years in colleges and universities, those of the high school are of comparatively recent origin. The Latin society of the Omaha High School under the direction of Miss Bessie Snyder and her colleagues has been one of the real pioneers in this work, and from it have come both inspiration and practical suggestions. As Miss Snyder says, "Interest and suggestion are the aim of the classical club rather than scientific information." Therefore the results are "the fruits of the spirit, and not to be computed." All testimony, in fact, goes to show that the classical club is a factor whose value cannot be overestimated in putting life into the formal study of Latin and Greek, and although the demand which it makes upon the time and energy of the teacher is heavy, it will be repaid many fold in the added interest and enthusiasm of classes.

I conclude with two thoughts which have been in my mind in writing this paper. The first is one which President Jones of the State Normal College is in the habit of emphasizing, that the true teacher is a teacher of the pupil rather than of the subject. The other is a quotation, I cannot say from whom: "When a boy leaves school it is not so much what he knows that counts, as what he likes." If these be true, then our individual work should aim to inspire in the pupil a feeling of greater responsibility and the class hour should be used for his highest good, not primarily to find out what he did not do, but in helping him to do what he thinks he cannot do, then demanding of him his best. Out of his consciousness of power and progress will spring a natural interest which can be greatly increased by the inspiration which a classical club affords. Only a wrong use of these factors need bring about any lowering of the standard of scholarship, while all testimony proves that their right use means a greater appreciation of Latin and Greek as a means of culture and an essential to a liberal education.